

FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

58-4	Boston North	AU	BLM.458
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Town/City: Belmont

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):
Snake Hill Road

Address: 77 Snake Hill Road

Historic Name: Carl Koch House

Uses: Present: single family dwelling

Original: single family dwelling

Date of Construction: 1940

Source: building permit

Style/Form: International Style

Architect/Builder: Carl Koch

Exterior Material:

Foundation: concrete

Wall/Trim: vertical boards

Roof: tar & gravel

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
none

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

1946 – garage

1986 – sunroom addition

Condition: good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

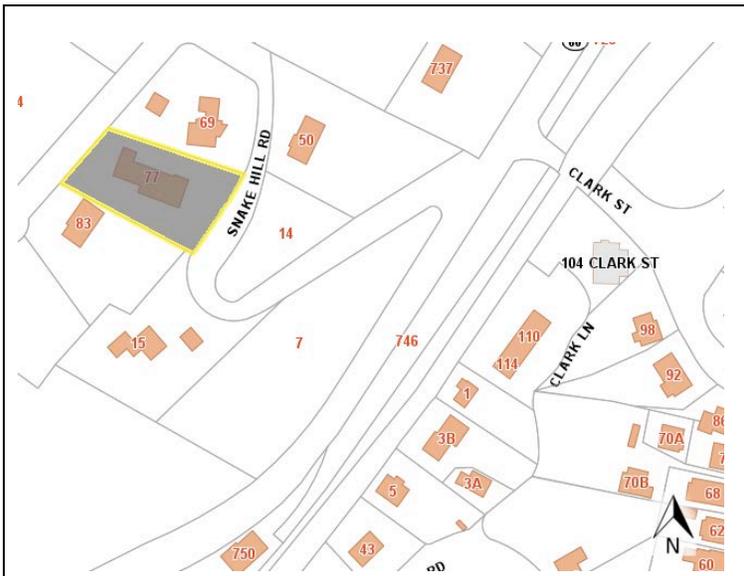
Acreage: 19,308 SF

Setting: Contemporary dwellings on steep hillside setting with views of Boston

Photograph



Locus Map



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Belmont Historic District Commission

Date (*month / year*): April 2016

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

BELMONT

77 SNAKE HILL ROAD

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

The Carl Koch House at 77 Snake Hill Road was built by the architect in 1940 for his own use. Like the other homes in the development the design utilizes the rocky hillside, simple materials, multiple levels and unembellished surfaces to blend the home into the landscape. From below the house on Snake Hill Road, the three staggered levels are visible; from the driveway it appears to be a single level with a single car attached garage set closest to the road. The house is clad in vertical boards with slant or low pitch rooflines displaying overhanging eaves. Stone chimneys rise from the roof. The window openings are grouped into bands and include large single-pane windows as well as casement and hopper units.

Other than the addition of the garage (1946?) and a single-story sunroom in 1986, the exterior of the house has seen few alterations since its construction.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

Albert Carl Koch Jr. (1912-1998) received his Master of Architecture from the Harvard School of Design in 1937 and studied under Walter Gropius, the Bauhaus founder. Koch traveled to Sweden on a fellowship in 1938 and was fascinated by the Swedes' use of fabrication. With a goal of building houses that were less expensive but still fully functional and pleasant homes, Koch's first project upon returning to the United States was a community housing project called Snake Hill. Koch initially developed the project as a way to design an inexpensive home for himself and his family. The house at 77 Snake Hill Road (Lot 6) was one of five houses constructed as part of the first phase of construction and was the architect's own home. The first five houses - #68, 69, 77, 83 & 89 were constructed in 1940 and were all designed by Carl Koch. In 1946 *Progressive Architecture* declared "the original five houses at Snake Hill designed by Carl Koch constitute one of the best known and most significant groups of contemporary houses in the world".

In March 1940 Edward Hartshorne and Carl Koch had petitioned for approval of a ten-lot subdivision and a winding road to be laid out off Pleasant Street through a seven-acre parcel of land that they had purchased from Ernest J. Corrigan. Corrigan had bought the land in 1928 from George V. Fletcher. The Snake Hill location was selected because of its magnificent view of Boston, the fact that it was within a quarter mile of transportation and stores and because the land was cheap due to the fact that its rocky ledges were not believed to be suitable for conventional homes. As reported in the *Belmont Citizen* on May 31, 1940, the planned community was the joint venture of five individuals – two Harvard instructors and three graduates. They were Carl Koch, architect and designer of the community; Dr. Edward Hartshorne and Dr. A. Lincoln Gordon, instructors at Harvard; lawyer Gardner Cushman and Harry B. Wissmann. The street was originally to be called "Witsend Road". It was renamed Snake Hill Road in October 1940. Originally the abutters owned and maintained their own boiler house and kept the street clear of ice and snow with a system of underground pipes (Betts 2012: 249-250).

Koch believed that open and flexible interior planning was the key to meeting the individual requirements of owners economically. Complicated details and expensive millwork were eliminated to the greatest degree possible. The Koch House was arranged on three levels, the lowest of which was built into a ledge of stone. Inside the rock was left exposed in the office and living room floors. Koch also designed the furnishings including sofas and upholstered plywood chairs. The cost of the home was \$6,160.

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The house was sold by Koch to Albert G. and Ethel Hill of Cambridge in 1949 (Book 7501, Page 261). Dr. Hill was an instructor in physics at MIT, director of the Research Laboratory of Electronics and held various governmental positions relative to the national defense. In 1962 the Hills sold the house to William and Martha Liller who owned it until 1983 (Book 10034, Page 19; 14873, Page 319). William DuMouchel and Christine Waternaux owned the house from 1983 to 1994. Jacob White and Barbara Bratzel purchased the house in 1994 (Book 24130, Page 164).

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

- Betts, Richard B. *The Streets of Belmont and How they Were Named* (2nd edition). Belmont: Belmont Historical Society, 2012.
"Five Houses in Belmont, Mass.", *Architectural Forum*, June 1941.
Middlesex County Registry of Deeds, Cambridge, MA
Robbins, Samuel Dowse, ed. *Who's Who in Belmont*. Belmont: Belmont Historical Society, 1972.
"3 New Houses at...Snake Hill, Belmont, Mass.", *Progressive Architecture*, October 1946.
Town of Belmont, Building Department Files.
Williams, Judy. Area form (BLM.AU) for Snake Hill Road, November 1982.

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2016 view from street

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Ezra Stoller photo of 77 Snake Hill Road

Source: *Architectural Forum*, June 1941

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Interior Views, *Architectural Forum*, June 1941

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